

IMMIGRATION AND THE SOUTH

BY ROBERT DE COURCY WARD

THE North finds itself greatly burdened with the many problems which have grown out of, or have at least been greatly aggravated by, the enormous and very indiscriminate immigration of the past few years, and is rapidly becoming convinced of the impossibility, even with unlimited resources of men and money, of properly assimilating this alien population so long as it is crowded into the slums, and so long as the stream of new immigrants continues to pour in with increasing volume. It is clear that the only remedies for existing conditions are, first, a considerable restriction of immigration, and second, the distribution of the present slum populations, as well as of the arriving aliens, through the agricultural districts. The second of these remedies alone is wholly inadequate, for to attempt to relieve the pressure in the crowded cities by dispersing their inhabitants, without at the same time further limiting the numbers of newcomers who pour in, is like trying to keep a boat bailed out without stopping the leak. Distribution alone simply opens the way for a still larger immigration; the overflowing populations of Europe can send ten new immigrants to fill every opening that may thus be created.

While the North is thus preparing to unload some of its alien burdens upon other parts of the country, and in this effort is naturally receiving every possible assistance from the railroad companies, who see in this distribution-scheme a large source of revenue to themselves, the South is developing a new-born zeal for immigration. From many parts of the South there comes a demand for laborers in the cotton fields and on the sugar plantations; in mines, mills, and factories; on the farms and in the cities. Newspapers in the North as well as in the South re-

peat the call, "more labor needed in the South."

It is not difficult to perceive some of the reasons for this new enthusiasm on the part of the South for the immigration which has thus far gone practically altogether into the Northern states.

(1) The rapid growth of manufacturing interests has resulted in a demand for thousands of workmen in mill and factory, which the native population has not been able to meet.

(2) The old methods of working the land, such as "cropping" and renting, which were adopted partly because of the antipathy of the negro to continuous daily work under the wage system, and partly because of the necessities of the planters, have impoverished the land and do not give the best return from it. Diversified or intensive farming will greatly improve existing conditions, and is developing rapidly. It will supply farm products for the growing needs of the manufacturing community and of the plantation, as well as for the Northern markets. It will preserve the fertility of the soil, and reduce the labor cost of the crop. For this diversified farming the negro is by many considered unfitted, while the northern European immigrant, with his skill in this direction, can find good openings throughout the South.

(3) The South has thus far had on the whole an encouraging though somewhat limited experience with aliens of several different nationalities, and therefore naturally favors a larger immigration. In the matter of alien immigration the South has hitherto experienced the benefits of very gentle, scattered, and refreshing showers, without any of the serious consequences of the alien cloudburst which has overwhelmed many Northern communities.

Small Italian colonies, more or less successful in their outcome, have been established at various points, as at Daphne and at Lambeth, Alabama, at Tonitown, Arkansas, and elsewhere. In Texas, Italians have succeeded in cotton and rice culture, in vine-growing and truck-farming. In Louisiana and in Mississippi large numbers of them have proved valuable help on sugar and cotton plantations and in truck-farming. In South Carolina a new Italian colony is to undertake grape and silk culture.

The Italian seems to be well fitted to do much of the work which needs doing in the South, and in many parts of the Southern country where Italians have settled they are praised as industrious, thrifty, frugal, good citizens, and as having increased land values. On some railroads, also, they are reported as being satisfactory laborers. On the other hand, it must be noted that the most successful settlements have been those of *northern* Italians; that the greater desirability of the northern Italian is recognized wherever experience has been had with both northern and southern Italians, and that thus far the number of Italians in the South has been small, and practically none of the less happy consequences of their congestion have been noted. There are also many employers who have found Italians unsatisfactory; have considered them no improvement upon the negro, and regard them as an undesirable element in the community. Numerous colonies of Germans and of many other nationalities have likewise succeeded well; but thus far the foreign elements have been unimportant, except locally, and data are not yet at hand for any exhaustive study of their effects upon the development of the South.

(4) The southern railroads are another and an important factor in creating a demand for more immigration. The inadequacy of the labor supply has stimulated concerted movements on the part of mill-owners, planters, and other large employers in many Southern states to attract

immigration, and in these movements the railroads are playing a very aggressive part, albeit their influence is not always apparent on the surface. Efforts are everywhere being made by the railroads to plant colonies of immigrants throughout the South. This movement has already gained great headway. In some cases the new arrivals are brought directly from Ellis Island; in some they are taken from one of the large Northern cities; in most, from the farming districts of the West and Northwest. The importation of Italian laborers into the Delta region has been especially heavy, although it is stated that about sixty per cent of these have already gone to the towns. Among other recent importations there have been Germans, Swedes, Hungarians, Danes, Poles, French Canadians, and Mexicans. So active are the railroads in this matter that it is often impossible to tell how much of the "demand for more labor" is a *bona fide* one, and how much is circulated by the railroads for their own ends. In order to increase the immigration of Italians into the South, the Southern railroads recently provided the Italian Ambassador with an extended tour through the South, from which journey that gentleman returned full of enthusiasm for the courtesies which were showered upon him, and determined to do all in his power to encourage the immigration of his countrymen into the Southern states. At a recent conference on immigration held in one of the Southern cities, the influence of the railroads was so strong that a paper urging some reasonable restriction of immigration was not allowed a public reading, and was not given to the press. That a wholesale distribution of immigrants by transportation companies is not so likely to be controlled by a desire to do what is best for the community as by purely selfish interests, is a fact which has not escaped the attention of observant persons in the South, some of whom have not been afraid to express their views very plainly on the subject.

(5) Probably the most important factor

in the Southern immigration situation is the negro himself. There is in the South to-day a widespread and decided reaction against the negro. Many of the white population are losing patience with him. He is charged with being less efficient than before the war; with incapacity, irresponsibility, and instability; with unfitness for and dissatisfaction with his work; with demanding too much pay and requiring too many holidays. Most of these complaints, it may be noted, are similar to those which are heard in the North with regard to white laborers and servants. Furthermore, many negroes, in common with the whites, are leaving the country and flocking to the cities, often making it impossible to secure negro labor for cotton picking or for work on the sugar plantations. Now, while the North has no special interest in the difficulty which some sugar-grower in Louisiana or some cotton-planter in Mississippi experiences in securing labor, it is vitally interested in the effect which foreign immigration into the South is having on the negro. It is perfectly clear that alien white immigrants are displacing the negro. He is going to the Southern cities, and in increasing numbers to the Northern cities. Italians are proving their ability and willingness to do work at least equal to that of the negro in the cotton fields. They have begun to displace the negro on the sugar plantations and truck farms of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Mexicans are found cheaper and more easily obtainable than negroes in parts of Mississippi. Hungarians, Slavs, and Italians are being imported from New York into the Birmingham district of Alabama to work in the furnaces and mines instead of the negroes. Italians, Mexicans, and Bohemians are replacing negroes in Texas, in Mississippi, in Georgia. On plantation and truck farms; in furnaces and mines; in factories and mills; in the occupations of city and country; even in domestic service, the black is steadily losing ground to the alien white. The result is twofold: there is a tendency

for the negro to leave the occupations which require greater skill and intelligence, and to take refuge in those which require less, or the negro gives up the struggle and goes to the city, especially in the North. It is the latter tendency which must attract the attention of thinking men and women in the North, who, already familiar with the conditions of negro life in the cities, cannot fail to view with anxiety the inevitable congestion of these Southern negroes in the slums of Northern cities. Into one city of 100,000 inhabitants in Massachusetts there came during the past winter 750 negroes from the South. This immigration has only just begun; it will gain greater and greater headway as more aliens pour into the South. What the result will be for the negro, time alone can tell, but those who have the welfare of the negro at heart may well ask themselves whether the indiscriminate admission of hundreds of thousands of aliens will not inevitably force the majority of the colored race down. This matter concerns more persons than a few mine owners in Alabama, or a few cotton planters in Mississippi or Louisiana. It is a national question.

The Southern negro is now engaged in a life and death struggle. A Southern editor writes: "The negro must now fight for his very existence. All along the line the battle is on." . . . "The white races . . . are disputing the negro's usefulness in those strongholds heretofore deemed impregnable to white attack." It cannot be denied that there is a distinct feeling of satisfaction in the South that the North is soon to have its share of the negro burden brought to its own doors, and a hope that actual contact with the negro will modify some of the sentimental ideas which have not altogether commended themselves to many Southerners. There is also the feeling that the best thing that could happen to the South, as well as to the colored race, would be the dispersion of the negro by the incoming of alien whites. A Baltimore paper has recently congratulated the South on the fact that

the coming of large numbers of white immigrants will supplant the negro, driving him North; will relieve the negro question of its sectional aspect; and may check the negro's rate of advance. Such statements represent some of the best Southern opinion. In spite of his shortcomings, the larger, although the least aggressive, portion of the Southern population prefers the negro to the alien white as tenant, laborer, or domestic servant. This class is represented in the following communication from West Virginia: "We wish peaceful, law-abiding citizens for the South, not with the idea of superseding negro labor, which must remain the best labor for the South. What we most need is to improve that labor by fair and proper education." Or again, in an Alabama letter, as follows: "The door of opportunity is open to the negro as long as he will enter and occupy it, but when he abandons it, and then finds an alien foe coming in and taking his place, his mouth will be closed against making complaint. . . . This is a critical time for the negroes of the South, and we feel deeply for them."

In the South, as in the North, there is the capitalist, mill owner, or railroad manager who wants "cheap labor;" who cares not whether the community or the immigrant himself is benefited so long as dividends are increased. It is a matter of indifference to such a man whether the labor of wife and child is necessary in order to eke out the low wages of the husband and father, nor does he concern himself about the increasing burdens of hospitals and almshouses which inevitably result from the breaking down in health of the overworked men, women, and children of the "cheap labor" class. Upon this class of employers there is no use in urging that American character is of more importance to preserve and develop than American wealth, and that only such immigration is desirable as adds to the moral and intellectual welfare of the country, as well as to its material wealth. The propaganda for the wholesale importation of

ignorant aliens into the South as a means of satisfying the present perfectly natural demand for more labor comes from this comparatively limited number of capitalists, and from the Southern railroads. That plans for importing thousands of "cheap laborers" are being carried out, is clear. It remains for the rest of the South to say how much farther these schemes shall be allowed to go. There is also an increasing demand for Chinese and Japanese laborers in the South, because many employers think that they would be more docile and more servile than either the negro or the European.

In the South, as in the North, there is a class of persons who are ignorant of the conditions which have resulted from the wholesale immigration of aliens of low standards of living and of morals, and who therefore have no opinion regarding desirable or undesirable immigration.

Thirdly, in by far the largest class of all, are found the great majority of the intelligent and patriotic citizens of the South, who say: The South does not want the "derelicts" and the "chronic discontented" of Europe. It does not wish to burden itself with vast expenditures for the support of pauper, criminal, diseased, insane, and physically defective aliens. It knows of the sweat-shops and gorged tenements of the alien colonies in the North, and would have none of them. It realizes that an influx of alien illiterates means a greatly increased expenditure for education, and feels that it has already a very heavy burden of illiteracy to bear. It knows that a great many of our present immigrants are too poor, too ignorant, too weak, and too sickly to be fitted for a successful agricultural life. It is opposed to the incoming of persons of such poor physique that they cannot support themselves by a good day's work. The influential citizens who hold such views as these are making themselves felt in the South. They are forcing their convictions upon the railroads. At the recent Immigration Conference at Birmingham, Alabama

(June 13), they carried a resolution calling for the exclusion of the criminal, the pauper, and the illiterate alien. They believe that the South should think twice before it allows its capitalists and its railroads to flood the country with "cheap" and ignorant alien laborers. They are convinced that while such an importation might give a temporary relief where labor is now scarce, it would bring in its wake, in the future, many vast and complex problems which the South has not yet had to face. It would soon add another race problem.

What the South most wants to-day is not the newly arrived, ignorant, and penniless alien, but the settler with means of purchase, preferably one who has already resided in the United States for some years and who is familiar with American customs, or else the immigrant with money, coming from northern Europe, skilled in intensive and diversified farming, and who can depend on his own exertions, manage his own business, market his own products, and save money. As the large plantations are cut up into small farms, thrifty tenants, not ignorant and pauper laborers, are needed. The newer farms throughout the South have been purchased very largely by farmers from the West and Northwest, either native Americans who have sold their old farms to recent immigrants, or foreigners who have lived in the country for a good many years — "predigested" immigrants, as one correspondent called them. Thousands of immigrants of these most desirable classes have recently been brought into the South from the Western and Northwestern states, and from northern Europe, showing in a most striking manner how easy a matter it is to secure desirable immigrants if the effort is made. Intelligent, industrious, strong, thrifty, skilled, independent farmers, with some money, are the class most desired, and can look forward to the greatest success. With the exception of the demand made by certain large employers, already referred to, there is a distinct feeling that hordes of

poor and ignorant laborers are not desirable, and many Southern editors have emphatically stated that the South would forego all the benefits to be gained from first-class foreign immigration rather than have thousands of aliens who are purely of the laboring class sent there.

As Italians constitute so large a proportion of the present alien immigration to the South, it is worth while to note what Baron Gustavo Tosti, Italian Consul at Boston, has to say regarding his own countrymen:—

"There is a misleading idea in certain quarters that 'the agricultural distribution of Italian immigrants' should be obtained simply through the employment of a large number of Italians as farm workers and farm hands. This would be only a palliative measure. The character of agricultural work is, by its very nature, precarious. The Italian immigrants would thus find employment during a few months of the year, when, for instance at harvest time, there is an enormous demand for labor. . . . But after a comparatively short period of occupation they would lapse into enforced idleness which would undoubtedly drive them back to the industrial centres. The only way to get at the root of the question is to transform a large portion of our immigrants into landowners or farmers." It must be remembered that to transform ignorant laborers, with but a few dollars in their possession, into landowners, is not a matter of a day or a year. It involves an expenditure of time and money. It is a matter of the assimilation of the immigrant and of the elevation of his standards of living. Thus neither the interests of those states which desire immigrants who shall at once buy their land, nor the best interests of the Italian immigrants themselves, as set forth by Baron Tosti, are met in a wholesale distribution of ignorant farm laborers. Further, while about 80 per cent of our Italian arrivals were farm laborers in Italy, they are unfamiliar with country life as we know it, for although they worked in the fields by day, their actual

residence was in the crowded towns. Their natural tendency is city-ward.

There are at present before the writer the results of a somewhat extended private correspondence, undertaken within a few weeks, in order to ascertain the views of representative Southerners regarding the immigration problem as it affects the South. Letters of inquiry were sent to the Governors of all the Southern states; to Commissioners of Agriculture, Labor, and Immigration; to other public officials, and to prominent citizens, asking for an explicit statement regarding the particular nationalities and the classes of immigrants most desired in the South, as well as the views of the person addressed concerning any desired changes in the United States immigration laws as a whole. The results of this inquiry, which have not before been made public, show an extraordinary unanimity of sentiment. Taking the replies of public officials alone, which represent every Southern state, 100 per cent prefer native Americans and northern Europeans who are skilled workmen with money, and who come with their families, intending permanent settlement. Between 90 per cent and 100 per cent of the Southern state officials protest against the immigration of Asiatics, of illiterates, and of aliens who desire to settle in cities; 84 per cent do not wish any immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, and 88 per cent are opposed to receiving the aliens distributed from northern cities. As to further amendments to the general immigration laws of the United States, the Southern officials who have been heard from, in every case but one, want the exclusion of aliens of poor physique; 92 per cent favor a head-tax of \$25 or more; nearly 90 per cent wish to have "assisted" immigrants debarred, and between 90 per cent and 100 per cent want no illiterates. The Governor of one state in the heart of the industrial South, who reports his state as being in great need of labor, favors the exclusion of aliens of poor physique, and a head-tax of \$25.

He writes as follows:—

"While we are inviting such people as we can use in our industrial districts and farms, I, as Governor of the State, am particularly anxious to avoid a too great influx of people whom it will be impossible to assimilate. We prefer very greatly the northern Europeans, but could use handsomely to their profit and to the profit of our people, some from *northern* Italy, say those raised on farms and desirous of a similar life here. . . . I am certain that we do not want, and we should insist that we do not get, people from the southern parts of Italy and the southern and eastern parts of Europe."

A correspondent in Alabama writes: "The craze for more labor is overreaching the bounds of prudence and the good of the country."

The Commissioner of Agriculture of one state says: "Our people will forego whatever advantage might come from immigration of the better class, if this is to be coupled with that of the slums of the cities."

The Secretary of the Board of Agriculture of another state writes: "We have far too many illiterate natives, many of them of course of the colored race, in this state already." And so on, in letter after letter. The replies of persons other than state officials, included in this correspondence, agree entirely with the results above given, and it may be noted that two previous official canvasses of the South, one made in 1896 by the Immigration Investigating Commission and the other made in 1901-02, by the Industrial Commission, as well as another private canvass made two years ago, led to precisely the same conclusions. Finally, within a very few weeks, a canvass made by the *Manufacturers' Record* of Baltimore, among the large employers of all kinds of skilled and partly skilled labor, other than agricultural, throughout the South, showed very strong preferences for native and north-European workmen, and on the whole a dissatisfaction with Italians where these have been tried.

The best interests of the South, future as well as present; the best interests of the immigrants themselves; the best interests of the American negro; the best judgment of representative Southern officials and of unprejudiced private citizens, — all give the same answer to the question, What kind of immigrants does the South want? It is clear that the South can have the best, and none but the best, if it insists on having them. Recent experience with the incoming settlers from the Northwestern states and from northern Europe has shown this. It is clear, from Northern experience, that immigration of the less desirable classes crowds out the more desirable. It is clear that the great advantages which the South should gain in the future from the incoming of honest, industrious, intelligent, thrifty,

and physically fit aliens can only be secured by making a careful selection of these immigrants, and by preventing the inflowing stream from becoming a vast and destructive flood. Where unskilled labor is needed, it should be sparingly introduced, under careful supervision by the State.

The South may well take to heart the lesson which the North has been learning regarding undesirable immigration. The North would be glad to have many of its city slums emptied into the South, and would rejoice, selfishly, if the South would take its full share of the incoming tide of aliens who are illiterate, who could not pay their own passages, and who are of such poor physique that they are unfitted to support themselves by a good day's work.